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**Fifth Committee**

**Summary record of the 52nd meeting**
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 22 March 1998, at 10 a.m.

*Chairman*: Mr. Abelian ..... (Armenia)
*Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions*: Mr. Mselle

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(a) Financing of the United Nations peacekeeping operations (*continued*)

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*The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.*

**Agenda item 112: Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations** (*continued*)

**Agenda item 119: Human resources management** (*continued*)

*Gratis personnel (continued)* (A/53/417/Add.1, A/53/715 and A/53/847; A/C.5/53/54)

1. **The Chairman** requested the Secretariat officials to note that meetings began at 10 o'clock exactly.

2. **Mr. Repasch** (United States of America) noted that by 28 February 1999 all gratis military officers had left the posts to be funded in future from the support account. The United States remained of the view that the rapid phasing-out of gratis personnel was the result of a regrettable decision, given, in particular, the difficulties and delays in recruiting the staff to replace them. He noted the view of the Advisory Committee (A/53/417/Add.1, para. 4) that the Secretary-General should have sought the concurrence of the General Assembly before maintaining in service beyond 28 February 1999 one gratis personnel in the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. His delegation considered that the continuation in service fell within the scope of General Assembly resolution 51/243, paragraph 4 (a), and that resolution 52/234, paragraph 18, was not applicable. He asked the Chairman of the Advisory Committee to comment.

3. **Mr. Mselle** (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) said that in its resolution 51/243, the General Assembly had requested the Secretary-General to phase out expeditiously gratis personnel and had taken note, in its resolution 53/11 of the Secretary-General's commitment that the recruitment process for the replacement of such personnel would be completed by 28 February 1999. However, the Secretary-General had authorized the continuation of an individual in the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. When introducing the report of the Advisory Committee at the 51st meeting, he [the Chairman] had indicated that while the Secretary-General had valid reasons to continue in service the gratis personnel concerned, the Committee believed that the Secretary-General should have sought prior concurrence either from the Assembly or, if it were not in session, from the Advisory Committee. General Assembly resolution 51/243 did not bar the Secretary-General from having recourse to gratis personnel; it merely defined the circumstances in which he could do so. Its provisions did not cover the continuance in service of personnel already in employment and the Secretary-General should not have assumed that there was no need to seek prior authorization before extending the services of the individual concerned.

4. **The Chairman** said that he took it that the Committee had concluded its general discussion of the question. Replies by the Secretariat to questions raised at the previous meeting would be made available in writing in informal consultations.

5. **Mr. Odaga-Jalomayo** (Uganda) said that replies to questions raised in a formal meeting should be provided in a formal meeting. It was useful to have them in writing, but they should appear in the official summary records. He wished to know whether the Secretariat had experienced genuine difficulty in terminating the appointments of gratis personnel and recruiting replacement staff, as stated by the representative of the United States. There was no trace of any such difficulty in the documents before the Committee.

6. **Ms. Buergo Rodríguez** (Cuba) agreed with the representative of Uganda that replies to questions raised in a formal meeting should be heard in a formal meeting.

7. **Mr. Sial** (Pakistan), recalling the commitment to replace all type II gratis personnel, including those in the two international tribunals (see General Assembly resolution 53/11) by 28 February 1999, in accordance with General Assembly resolutions 51/243 and 52/234, said that the Secretary-General should have sought the prior concurrence of the Assembly before extending the appointment of a prosecution co-counsel at the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia.

8. **Mr. Wortel** (Director, Operational Services Division, Office of Human Resources Management), replying to questions raised at the previous meeting, said, in response to the representative of Guyana, who had spoken on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, that the Secretariat had noted the comments on the format of reports on gratis personnel, and would continue to follow the format of document A/32/709, with supplementary information of the kind contained in document A/C.5/53/54. He would report further on the exact functions of the expert in the Office of the Iraq Programme in informal consultations, but wished to state that he had no procurement functions and that the Office of the Iraq Programme did not perform duties normally performed by procurement officers who were staff members of the Organization.

9. Replying to the representative of Cuba, who had asked why the United Nations Office at Nairobi (UNON) had used the services of gratis personnel rather than recruiting

consultants, he said that that was due to the availability of the expertise and the decision by UNEP management to accept offers of gratis personnel. The *ex post facto* reporting of the engagement of gratis personnel by the United Nations Office at Nairobi was probably due to the fact that it had taken some time to inform all offices administered by UNON that type II gratis personnel should be discontinued. The Office had, however, confirmed that all type II gratis personnel had been phased out by 28 February 1999, as mandated by the General Assembly. The data allowing reconciliation of the information in annexes II and VI to document A/53/715 would be provided in informal consultations.

10. With reference to the questions raised by the representative of Uganda regarding the recruitment of seconded active military and police personnel, of the four vacancies indicated in the annex to document A/53/847, three had been filled, and the fourth, which was temporarily encumbered, would be filled shortly. Regrettably, only one female candidate had thus far been approved for that type of active duty. Information on the status of recruitment of civilian personnel, including their nationalities, would be provided by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations in informal consultations.

11. He had noted the comments by the representative of Japan regarding the recruitment process. The recruitment of staff to replace gratis personnel in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations had been assigned priority so as to comply with the mandate of the General Assembly without affecting the operational capacity of the Department to provide adequate support to peacekeeping missions around the world. The cooperation between the staff of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Office of Human Resources Management, within the Secretariat, and the staff of those Member States which had submitted candidates had facilitated the efforts made in that regard. As reported in another context, the time line for recruitment had considerably decreased during 1998, and the Secretariat anticipated that that trend would continue in 1999.

12. With regard to the gratis personnel appointed by the International Tribunals for the Former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, the information requested would be provided in informal consultations. He confirmed, however, that all the staff concerned (3 P-4, 5 P-3 and 6 P-2 level staff) were on one-year fixed-term appointments with expiration dates between 1 July 1999 and 7 March 2000.

13. Responding to questions by the representatives of Japan and Pakistan on the date of issuance of the administrative instruction on procedures for appointing type II gratis personnel in future, he confirmed that all offices and departments had been made fully aware of the mandate to phase out all such personnel by 28 February 1999; the Secretariat had decided to concentrate on meeting that mandatory deadline rather than on issuing instructions on how gratis personnel could be engaged. The administrative instruction would allow the new policy for the engagement of type II gratis personnel to be implemented throughout the Organization.

**Agenda item 118: Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations** *(continued)* (A/53/11/Add.1 and Add.1/Corr.1)

14. **Mr. Etuket** (Chairman of the Committee on Contributions), introducing the report of the Committee on Contributions on its special session held in New York from 8 to 12 February 1999 (A/53/11/Add.1 and Add.1/Corr.1), recalled that the session had been convened pursuant to General Assembly resolution 53/36 A, of 30 November 1998, to consider representations from Member States with respect to the application of Article 19 of the Charter. The Committee on Contributions had had before it the original requests by Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of the Congo, Georgia, Guinea-Bissau and Iraq, and, in addition, requests for exemption under Article 19 forwarded by the Acting President of the General Assembly from Cambodia, Honduras and Nicaragua. Additional information had been provided, orally and in writing, by the Governments of the eight Member States and the Secretariat.

15. In the course of reviewing the application of Article 19 at earlier sessions, the Committee on Contributions had reached some general conclusions that had helped to guide it in its work at the special session. The Committee had earlier concluded that no one set of guidelines for considering requests for exemption could be applied uniformly. The particular circumstances of each Member State must be considered when reviewing such requests. That said, the Committee did draw on its experience with other cases and endeavoured to apply precedents as appropriate. The Committee on Contributions had also stressed the need to apply a stringent standard to requests for exemption. Any exemption that it recommended should be of limited duration and any requests for exemption should be fully reviewed on their merits. The Committee had also emphasized on a number of occasions the importance of having the fullest possible information, including on economic aggregates, government revenues, foreign exchange resources, indebtedness and any difficulties in meeting domestic or international financial obligations. In that connection members of the Committee on Contributions

had noted some improvement in the information available at its special session. Continuing improvements were necessary, however, if the Committee was to carry out satisfactorily its responsibilities in that area.

16. In reviewing the eight cases referred to it at its special session, the Committee on Contributions had touched on a number of issues relating to the application of Article 19, including the impact of the timing of Member States' payments with regard to the possible application of Article 19 when they faced conditions beyond their control, the issue of multi-year payment plans and the question of the date of expiration of waivers granted by the General Assembly. In that connection, members of the Committee had recalled that they had already decided to consider further issues relating to the application of Article 19 at the Committee's fifty-ninth session. They had also recalled the Committee's mandate, in General Assembly resolution 53/36 C, of 18 December 1998, at its fifty-ninth session to consider and make recommendations on the possibilities for tightening the application of Article 19 of the Charter and to review the procedural aspects of the consideration of requests for exemption under Article 19 of the Charter, in particular modalities for dealing with such requests received when the Committee was not in session. In view of that, the nature of the Committee's mandate at its special session and the limited time available, the Committee had decided that such general policy decisions should be considered further during its review of the application of Article 19 at its fifty-ninth session.

17. Turning to the specific recommendations contained in the report on the special session, he said that the Committee on contributions had noted the formidable problems faced by Bosnia and Herzegovina in the wake of the conflict and the process of institution building under the Dayton-Paris Peace Agreement. The Committee had also noted that the Government's proposals with respect to its request under Article 19 were still at a formative stage. Despite doubts expressed by some members, the Committee had determined that in the current circumstances the failure of Bosnia and Herzegovina to pay the amount necessary to avoid the application of Article 19 was due to conditions beyond its control, and recommended that it should be permitted to vote in the General Assembly until 30 June 1999.

18. The Committee had noted the serious problems faced by Cambodia following the protracted civil war and the violent events of July 1997. It had also noted Cambodia's intention to make the necessary payments to the United Nations by June 1999. The Committee had concluded that Cambodia's current failure to pay the necessary amount to avoid the application of Article 19 was due to conditions beyond its control, and recommended that it should be permitted to vote in the General Assembly until 30 June 1999.

19. The Committee had noted the devastation caused in the Republic of the Congo by the civil war of 1997 and the recent resurgence of violence in the country. Those recent developments, which were likely to hamper efforts at national reconstruction, had led the Committee to conclude that the Congo's failure to pay the necessary amount was due to conditions beyond its control and to recommend that it should be permitted to vote in the General Assembly until 30 June 2000.

20. The Committee had noted the impact on Georgia of continuing hostilities in Abkhazia, the Russian economic crisis and drought, and had also noted Georgia's commitment to meet its obligations to the United Nations. The Committee had concluded that in the current circumstances the failure of Georgia to pay the amount necessary to avoid the application of Article 19 was due to conditions beyond its control, and recommended that it should be permitted to vote in the General Assembly until 30 June 1999.

21. The Committee had noted the impact of the armed conflict in Guinea-Bissau and the institutional crisis faced by the country as well as the difficulty of finding a political solution. It had concluded that in the circumstances the failure of Guinea-Bissau to pay the minimum amount necessary was due to conditions beyond its control, and recommended that it should be permitted to vote in the General Assembly until 30 June 2000.

22. The Committee had noted the devastating impact of hurricane Mitch on the infrastructure of Honduras, which had been affected more severely than neighbouring countries. Honduras also faced the enormous task of meeting the immediate needs of the population and providing for national rehabilitation and reconstruction. Despite reservations on the part of one member, the Committee had concluded that the failure of Honduras to pay the amount necessary was due to conditions beyond its control, and recommended that it should be permitted to vote in the General Assembly until 30 June 2000.

23. The Committee had been provided with information about the current situation of Iraq and the impact of economic sanctions on the country. Iraq had advised the Committee that, despite its compliance with Security Council resolutions, the continuation of sanctions made it impossible for the time being for it to meet its obligations to the United Nations. The Committee had noted the political aspects of the issues raised in the context of the request and

had concluded that they went beyond its technical advisory role to the General Assembly. There had been some discussion in the Committee of whether Iraq's outstanding contributions could be met from sales of Iraqi oil, as had been the case with the Compensation Commission and the oil-for-food programme. Some members had felt that it would be worth exploring that possibility.

24. The Committee had noted the devastating impact of hurricane Mitch on the economic, physical and social infrastructure of Nicaragua, one of the poorest countries in the region. It had also noted the enormity of the task of rehabilitation and reconstruction. Despite the reservations expressed by one member, the Committee had concluded that the failure of Nicaragua to pay the amount necessary to avoid the application of Article 19 was due to conditions beyond its control, and recommended that it should be permitted to vote in the General Assembly until 30 June 2000.

25. **Mr. Stein** (Germany) spoke on behalf of the European Union, the associated countries of Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, and, in addition, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway.

26. The previous autumn the European Union had been reluctant to discuss the issue of exemptions to the application of Article 19 without the view of the Committee on Contributions. On a formal level, it had wished to observe rule 160 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, pursuant to which the Committee on Contributions advised the General Assembly on the action to be taken with regard to the application of Article 19 of the Charter. On a technical level, the European Union, without questioning the General Assembly's prerogative of deciding to waive the application of Article 19, had considered the Committee's opinion to be necessary. The European Union thus welcomed the fact that the Committee on Contributions had held a special session and that its report again opened up the possibility of taking decisions in that regard. The European Union endorsed the essence of the Committee's recommendations.

27. The European Union was grateful to the Committee on Contributions for having pointed out in paragraph 10 of its report that many Member States regularly paid only just enough to retain or regain their votes, which constituted an infringement of the Charter of the United Nations. Thought should be given to taking into account the payments history of Member States when considering requests for exemption under Article 19. The European Union noted the Committee's intention of studying that issue and looked forward to its views.

28. He recalled that, with a view to improving the Organization's financial situation, the European Union had proposed stricter application of Article 19. In that regard, Austria, which had then held the Presidency of the Union, had proposed on 26 October 1998 that the Committee on Contributions should consider the practical repercussions of strengthening the application of Article 19. Measures envisaged might include the semi-annual calculation and application of Article 19 and comparison of arrears with the amount payable for the preceding two years. A net rather than a gross approach would better reflect member States' payments. The Committee on Contributions might wish to consider further the impact of reducing the "minimum assessment" or the "floor rate". The Committee could also consider the reasons why Member States falling under Article 19 did not bring the matter to its attention with sufficient notice for it to consider their case at its regular session. It could also consider why States often provided incomplete information, and whether the Secretariat could better advise Member States on the procedures and deadlines for the submission of information. The European Union noted in that regard that the Committee on Contributions intended to continue to review certain aspects of the question of the application of Article 19 at its fifty-ninth session and wished the Committee to consider the aspects it had raised as well.

29. **Mr. Watanabe** (Japan) said that he had three remarks to make. Firstly, noting that the fundamental question remained of the procedure to be followed in granting exemptions to the application of Article 19 of the Charter, he hoped that it would be considered from a general viewpoint and in greater depth at the next session of the Committee on Contributions. Secondly, as indicated in paragraph 10 of the report of the Committee on Contributions and as stated by the representative of Germany, many Member States regularly paid only just enough to retain or regain their votes. It was thus important to emphasize once again that each Member State should make every effort to pay its contributions, whatever the level, so as to place the Organization on a sound financial footing. Thirdly, he noted that the length of the exemptions recommended by the Committee on Contributions varied according to the State. In the case of four of them, it went to 30 June 2000, whereas in other cases, for example Cambodia, whose case his delegation was familiar with and which had the right to every sympathy on account of the difficulties it was experiencing, it went only to 30 June 1999. Without contesting the validity of those recommendations, he sought clarification of the reasons for the different treatment.

**Agenda item 114: Programme planning** *(continued)*
(A/53/122 and Add.1; A/C.5/53/CRP.1/Rev.1)

30. **Ms. Abrenica** (Chief, Central Monitoring and Inspection Unit, Office of Internal Oversight Services), introducing the Secretariat's note on the programme performance of the United Nations for the biennium 1996–1997 (A/C.5/53/CRP.1/Rev.1), said that the note had been issued in accordance with General Assembly resolution 53/207, section V. The departments and offices concerned had been invited to provide information on the outputs which had been postponed to the biennium 1998–1999 and on the reasons for postponement. Of the 57 outputs originally postponed, some had been delivered in 1998 and it was proposed to terminate others for the reasons indicated in the relevant parts of the note. Other outputs were to be delivered in 1999 and some, to be delivered pursuant to decisions of legislative organs, had been deferred to the biennium 2000–2001.

31. **Ms. Buergo Rodríguez** (Cuba) welcomed the submission in a timely manner to the General Assembly of the information contained in the note by the Secretariat and observed that the revised document omitted some information contained in the original version. Her delegation looked forward to in-depth, substantive consideration of the question by the General Assembly.

32. **The Chairman** proposed that the Committee should recommend to the General Assembly that it should transmit the note by the Secretariat on the programme performance of the United Nations for the biennium 1996–1997 (A/C.5/53/CRP.1/Rev.1) to the Committee for Programme and Coordination for consideration at its thirty-ninth session.

33. *It was so decided.*

34. **The Chairman** said that the Committee had thus concluded its consideration of agenda item 114 and he requested the Rapporteur to report directly thereon to the General Assembly.

**Agenda item 117: Pattern of conferences** *(continued)*
(A/53/826, A/53/827 and A/53/833)

35. **Mr. Riesco** (Assistant Secretary-General for General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services) introduced the Secretary-General's reports on the provision of interpretation services to meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States (A/53/826) and on the improved utilization of conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi (A/53/827), the content of which had previously been presented orally and which were submitted to the Committee in writing in accordance with General Assembly resolution 53/208.

36. He then introduced the report on the impact of economy measures on the delivery of mandated conference services (A/53/833). The Secretariat had had some difficulty in determining the meaning of the words "economy measures". Measures to improve the financial situation of the Organization had been taken in 1996, but the situation had subsequently become more complicated. The human and financial resources approved by the General Assembly had begun to fluctuate, undermining the capacity of conference services to meet demand. The report described the fluctuations and their consequences, as well as the measures taken to cope with them.

37. After concluding his introduction of the documents before the Committee, he responded to questions raised by the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic the week before at the Committee's 51st meeting. With regard to the Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, the General Assembly, in March 1998, had decided that documentation for the Conference would be issued in the Organization's six official languages. The Conference had not met since then, but, in accordance with the Assembly's decision, documents for its next session, scheduled for the last quarter of 1999, would be issued in six languages. The representative of the Syrian Arab Republic had also raised questions about the publication of the press release containing General Assembly resolutions. The rationale for those press releases was to provide a temporary reference volume while awaiting issuance of the *Official Records* of the General Assembly containing the resolutions. The French and English versions of the press release were prepared by the Department of Public Information, and the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services only printed them, with issuance in February. The Arabic and Spanish versions of the press release must, for technical reasons, be prepared by the translation and editorial services, which delayed their issuance until April. Until 1997, the *Official Records* of the General Assembly containing the resolutions adopted had appeared in all languages in June or July. Technical innovations had made it possible to bring forward their date of issuance to April, thus depriving the Arabic and Spanish press releases, which came out at the same time or later, of their *raison d'être*. The Secretariat had also noted the Advisory Committee's comments on General Assembly resolutions in a report on duplication of publications. In view of those considerations the Secretariat had not issued the Arabic and Spanish versions of the press release in 1998 and would not issue them in 1999. Regarding the publications about the Organization entitled *United*

*Nations in Brief* and *Basic Facts about the United Nations*, both were information documents but were also intended for sale. They were thus aimed at specific publics and had specific objectives and for that reason were published in specific languages. *United Nations in Brief* was published in the six official languages and *Basic Facts about the United Nations* was published in English, Spanish and French.

38. The representative of Pakistan had asked about implementation of General Assembly resolutions 52/214 and 53/208. He had checked the contents of resolution 53/208, which contained 11 provisions relating to requests by Member States and 50 provisions giving the Secretariat instructions, including 14 on the preparation of reports. Implementation of the resolution was thus an immense task. The Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services had written formally to all of the departments required to participate in the implementation of resolution 53/208 and, in particular, to departments from which reports were requested. In addition, at least two reports were to be prepared jointly with other departments. The Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services would shortly resume its ongoing dialogue with all committee secretaries and would continue to insist on the joint obligation to comply with General Assembly directives. In conclusion, he trusted that the Department's work would meet the expectations of Member States.

39. **Mr. Sulaiman** (Syrian Arab Republic), referring to the use of modern technology mentioned in the report on the impact of economy measures on the delivery of mandated conference services (A/53/833, para.16), said that his delegation was in favour of the increased use of technological innovations at the United Nations provided that the quality of services provided was not affected. It appeared from the report that conference services had had to make use of temporary assistance, which showed that there was a shortage of staff. The General Assembly in 1997 had accepted the Secretary-General's proposal to abolish a large number of vacant posts in conference services; that had led to a deterioration in the quality of translation, which was not mentioned in the report. The General Assembly, in its resolution 53/208 A, paragraph 32, had requested the Secretary-General to ensure that the use of remote interpretation and translation did not affect the quality of interpretation and translation and did not in itself lead to a reduction in language posts. It was, however, apparent from the report that increased use of those techniques had had an impact on conference services and its outputs. It had also been stated that remote interpretation and remote translation would be used only for international conferences and specialized meetings, while paragraph 16 of the report stated that their use would be optimized. That should not take place without the approval of the General Assembly. Paragraph 17 stated that it had been necessary to use contractual translation for the translation of summary records within the deadlines. His delegation was gravely concerned by that development, which followed major post reductions. The question must remain under consideration, for the General Assembly had requested the Secretary-General on many occasions to maintain conference services at levels that would ensure optimal results.

40. With respect to the replies given by the Assistant Secretary-General to questions raised by his delegation, he noted with satisfaction that documentation for the next session of the Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names would be translated into the six official languages. Regarding the Arabic and Spanish versions of the volume of resolutions issued as a press release, the Assistant Secretary-General had stated that they had been discontinued because, by the time they were issued, the official volume of resolutions had appeared in the six languages. That did not mean that there was no point in translating the press releases. His delegation would follow up on the issue should the General Assembly take a decision thereon.

41. Regarding the publication entitled *Basic Facts about the United Nations*, the Assistant Secretary-General should ensure that the Secretariat kept the question in mind when the General Assembly reviewed, at its fifty-fourth session, the need to publish that very important document in the six languages.

42. **Ms. Buergo Rodríguez** stated her delegation's concern at the impact of economy measures on the delivery of conference services, and noted in particular the comment in paragraph 17 of document A/53/833 that translating summary records contractually made it harder to ensure consistency and quality. Her delegation would continue to follow the question as it had in recent years in the context of the pattern of conferences.

43. With regard to the abolition of 203 posts proposed at the end of 1997 by conference services, her delegation doubted that the figure was accurate. She also doubted that the number of posts abolished corresponded to the number of vacancies. She would return to the issue when the Committee considered the report in depth.

44. **Mr. Odaga-Jalomayo** (Uganda), referring to document A/53/833, endorsed the comments made by the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic regarding the quality of interpretation and of documents, as well as the

comments on the pilot projects. He was concerned by the shortcomings mentioned in paragraph 17 of the document and hoped that, as indicated in paragraph 18, conference services could address the situation. Nevertheless, he wondered how the Secretariat could do so by adjusting resources inasmuch as, as was clearly apparent from the document, the fundamental problem was the inadequacy of resources. Further, it was hard to understand how improvements in planning and the allocation of services and resources had resulted in a reduction in services for regional and other major groupings of Member States. He would welcome clarification.

45. Nevertheless, his main concern was the use of conference facilities at Nairobi. Noting that the report thereon (A/53/827) was an update of the oral report given to members of the Committee in the autumn of 1998, he failed to see any new elements in the report distinguishing the situation from that described in the oral report. He wished to have clarification of paragraphs 21 and 24, in particular regarding the excessive vacancy rates in translation and editorial services and the managed assignment system.

46. **Mr. Atiyanto** (Indonesia) welcomed the issuance of document A/53/826 and reiterated that, in the view of his delegation, regional and other major groupings of Member States played an essential role in facilitating decision-making at the United Nations. He noted that the Secretary-General had mentioned the Group of 77 and China as an important grouping of Member States. His delegation would like the Secretariat to provide, in writing, the composition of regional and other major groupings of Member States which were routinely provided with conference services by the Secretariat. With regard to the comments by the representative of Uganda on the report on the improved utilization of conference facilities at Nairobi (A/53/827), he drew attention to the conclusions and proposed actions of the Secretary-General in paragraph 27. His delegation looked forward to subsequent discussion of the question by the Committee.

47. **Ms. Powles** (New Zealand) said that her delegation commended conference services on its efforts and spirit of innovation in making the best possible use of resources allocated through productivity gains and a reordering of priorities.

48. **Mr. Zhang Wanhai** (China) said that his delegation was very concerned by the quality of the services provided by the Secretariat, in particular the translations and documents produced by conference services. He noted, in paragraph 13 of document A/53/833, that managerial and technological improvements and the expectation that the demand for meetings and documents would not return to the record levels experienced from 1992 to 1995 had made it possible for conference services, at the end of 1997, to propose the abolition of 203 posts. He asked the Secretariat to provide further details, including the category and level of the posts abolished and the vacancy rate in each language service; he would make further comments when that information was available.

49. **Mr. Amolo** (Kenya) endorsed the views expressed by the Syrian Arab Republic, Cuba, Uganda, Indonesia and China, and encouraged the Secretariat to continue to explore ways of improving the status of the United Nations Office at Nairobi, in particular by encouraging other divisions and departments to apply the relevant provisions of General Assembly resolutions.

50. **Mr. Riesco** (Assistant Secretary-General for General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services) said that conference services hoped to be able to make good the inadequacies referred to in paragraph 17 of document A/53/833 by identifying sectors in which more resources were needed, by using fluctuations in demand to reallocate resources or reorder priorities in favour of sectors with the highest demand, and by continuing and refining its programme of technological innovations, which was expected to produce qualitative improvements in certain services in the near future without the need for further major investment.

51. Any reduction in the capacity to provide interpretation services to regional and other groupings of Member States as a result of planning improvements was because the Secretariat had thus far counted on the cancellation of meetings included in the calendar of conferences to provide interpretation services for bodies whose meetings were not programmed. The number of cancelled meetings had been lower than before, and the Secretariat had no longer had the same latitude. It was nevertheless endeavouring to tackle the problem by other means, in particular by taking account in its planning of the potential needs of non-priority users and encouraging them to make their requests sufficiently far ahead.

52. The information given in paragraphs 21 and 24 of the report on the improved utilization of conference facilities at Nairobi (A/53/827) and that on vacancy rates was identical to that provided to the Fifth Committee in the autumn. The major new elements, comprising measures to implement General Assembly decisions and recommendations, were contained in paragraph 27 of the report. The statistics on the meetings held at the Nairobi conference centre had been

updated and included figures for 1998. Talks were under way with the Office of Human Resources Management on the proposed managed assignment system, which would soon be the subject of a report. Further to a request by the General Assembly, another report, on the career prospects of language staff, was also being prepared. The question of managed assignments and their potential impact on vacancies would be dealt with in the two reports.

53. At the request of Indonesia, he enumerated the regional and other major groupings of Member States to which the Secretariat provided interpretation services: the Group of Asian States, the Group of African States, the Latin American and Caribbean Group, the Group of Western Asian States, the Group of Western European and Other States, the Group of Eastern European States, the Group of 77 and China, the Group of Non-Aligned Countries, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the Group of Least Developed Countries, and the Group of Small Island Developing States. The Secretariat would prepare a complete list for the Committee, indicating the languages in which the groups required interpretation services.

54. In response to a question raised by China, he said that conference services would prepare a table showing staff movements in conference services since 1997 by unit, function, category and language.

55. **Mr. Odaga-Jalomayo** (Uganda) asked why the resources made available as a result of the efficiency gains referred to in paragraph 15 of document A/53/833 had not been used to make good some of the inadequacies mentioned in paragraph 17. He also wished to know what the Secretariat meant, in paragraph 10, by "documents continued to be issued within the time-frames customary in the past".

56. **Mr. Riesco** (Assistant Secretary-General for General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services) said that, because of the specialization of language and conference personnel, it was not easy to assign them to duties other than those relating to their function. However, the computerization of translation services, as a result of which all translators could translate on screen and have quicker access to terminology databases and reference documents, allowed them to devote more time to translation as such and to improve its quality. The Secretariat had not sought to increase productivity in view of the stabilization of the volume of work and the need, stressed by many delegations both in the Fifth Committee's informal consultations and in the Committee on Conferences, to improve the quality of translations. It had, rather, sought to voluntarily increase the rate of revision and to ensure consistency in documents that were split among several translators. By helping to improve the quality of translations, the introduction of new technology had thus remedied one of the inadequacies identified.

57. Regarding delays in issuance, documents appeared neither later nor earlier than before. The main reason for the late issuance of a number of documents was not attributable to conference services: it was because documents were not submitted to conference services within established deadlines. With current staffing conference services was not able to speed up the issuance of documents which were submitted late.

58. **Mr. Sial** (Pakistan) recalled that the non-implementation of General Assembly resolution 52/214 B and subsequent resolutions and decisions dealing with the standardization of the presentation of reports by the Secretariat had been raised on several occasions. Under resolution 53/208 B, paragraph 14, the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services coordinated the assignment of responsibilities for the implementation of all General Assembly resolutions and decisions. It had just been indicated that the Department was actively engaged in that task, which he welcomed. Nevertheless, he wondered why some reports prepared by the Secretariat and some expert bodies did not follow the format prescribed by the General Assembly in those resolutions even though the Assembly had emphasized the importance of that format for the clear understanding of documents.

59. **Mr. Riesco** (Assistant Secretary-General for General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services) said that he was well aware that the desired uniformity in implementation of the instructions given by the General Assembly had yet to be achieved. He hoped, nevertheless, that the documents prepared by his own department followed the rules on presentation wherever appropriate. The question had been brought to the attention of all departments and to committee secretaries and, through them, to submitting departments. Focal points had also been designated to ensure the coordination of documentation. The General Assembly's instructions were not taken lightly and their mandatory character was fully understood and stressed. There was room for optimism and for expecting that the goal of standardization would finally be attained in the relatively near future. In any event, a particular effort would be made in that regard in 1999. That said, the Department had encountered reluctance, not in the Secretariat, but on the part of certain bodies that considered that the presentation format imposed was not compatible with their own requirements for preparing reports, even though those reports were submitted to the General Assembly, which was the body requiring that

format. Senior staff in the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services and other author departments were also discussing the possibility of generalizing the so-called "electronic flow" method, involving the preparation of documents electronically at every stage of their preparation, from the initial draft to the final text, incorporating in the software used appropriate standards that would allow the desired format to be imposed.

60. **The Chairman** said that patience and realism were required, since change could not occur overnight in a structure as complex as the Secretariat. He proposed that the Committee should submit two draft decisions to the General Assembly for adoption. Firstly, the General Assembly would take note of the reports of the Secretary-General on the provision of interpretation services to meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States (A/53/826) and on the improved utilization of conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi (A/53/827). Secondly, it would decide to transmit the report of the Secretary-General on the impact of economy measures on the delivery of mandated conference services to the Committee on Conferences for further consideration at its forthcoming session.

61. **Mr. Odaga-Jalomayo** (Uganda) said that it would be preferable to transmit the report to the Advisory Committee since the questions raised were more within the competence of that body.

62. **The Chairman** said that, in view of the objection raised by the representative of Uganda, the question would be referred to informal consultations.

63. **Mr. Moktefi** (Algeria), referring to document A/C.5/53/CRP.1/Rev.1, said that the General Assembly had requested a document enumerating the outputs it was proposed to terminate. The Committee for Programme and Coordination had made such a recommendation to the General Assembly and also recommended that the competent intergovernmental bodies should be consulted. Yet the note introduced before the Committee contained only proposals by the Secretariat and the views of various departments. Accordingly, in his view, the Committee was not in a position to take a decision on the question.

**Agenda item 143: Administrative and budgetary aspects of the financing of the United Nations peacekeeping operations** *(continued)*

**(a) Financing of the United Nations peacekeeping operations** *(continued)*

*Death and disability benefits* (A/C.5/52/51)

64. **The Chairman** proposed that the Committee should recommend to the General Assembly that it should take note of the note by the Secretary-General containing the quarterly report for the period from 1 October to 31 December 1998 on progress made in processing outstanding death and disability claims.

65. *It was so decided.*

*The meeting rose at noon.*